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United States Mission to the OSCE

Detention of Eston Kohver in Russia

As delivered by Deputy Chief of Mission Kate Byrnes
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
September 18, 2014

The United States expresses its deep concern over the ongoing detention of Eston Kohver by Russian authorities and calls on Russia to expedite Mr. Kohver's safe return to Estonia.

On September 5, Mr. Kohver, an Estonian official, was seized on Estonian territory near the Estonian-Russian border while carrying out official duties to prevent transnational crime. Russia has confirmed that Mr. Kohver is currently in custody in Moscow.

Developments since the incident have been troubling. Despite three official requests, Russia denied Estonian officials consular access to Mr. Kohver within the 72-hour window, as required by the bilateral agreement between Estonia and Russia. Consular access was finally granted on September 9. Estonia has been granted access to Mr. Kohver twice since his detention but further requests for meetings have so far been denied, with no contact since September 12.

Estonian and Russian border officials also reached agreement on details of the incident, including the fact that Mr. Kohver was in Estonia when seized, but Russian officials subsequently failed to sign off on the agreed account. Russia now denies any incursion onto Estonian soil to seize Mr. Kohver.

We understand that Russian officials currently expect Mr. Kohver to remain in detention for at least two months before any hearing will be held regarding his status. Mr. Kohver's seizure and subsequent treatment raises serious issues regarding Russia's compliance with its international legal obligations.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.